

ADVENTURE IN A GAMING HOUSE.

It was in the spring of 18— that I found myself gliding upon the waters of the mighty Mississippi, and bound for the Crescent City, New Orleans.

With a single exception, I had formed no traveling acquaintances on board the boat, although I had been nearly two days upon my journey which was becoming somewhat monotonous.

He called himself George Thorn, of Kentucky; so his card read, which he gave me in exchange for mine.

To our surprise Thorn drew a wallet from his pocket, and produced an equal amount of money, then sweeping the cards they had been using from the table to the floor, he called for a fresh pack, and passing them, as the attendant brought them to him, rapidly through his hand, he gave them to his adversary, remarking to him as he did so, to "mind his glances as he went through that operation."

"Do you never play at cards?" said I to him, as he left a group that were standing about a table of four players, and noting the progress of the game.

"Oh, yes," said he, "but where is the use of playing there, those fellows (nodding towards the players) can tell every card in the pack by the backs, and they are trying hard to pluck some poor pigeon from among the passengers, but with indifferent success; beware of them, sir."

I thanked him for his friendly warning, and at the same time expressed my astonishment at his affirmation. To convince me of the truth of it, he called the steward of the boat, and ordered him to bring him a fresh pack of cards, which were brought, and he handed the pack to me, bidding me to shuffle them.

"One hundred more," said the gambler, again.

"I call you," said Thorn.

"Three aces and a king!" said Thorn, quietly, as he displayed his own cards, and with his eyes fixed steadily upon his opponent, folded up the money and crammed it into his pocket.

"Fortune favors you," said the gambler, stoically, too well schooled to betray any emotion or chagrin at the result.

"So it seems," said the other.

"But I hope to meet you again, sir; for I must have my revenge after so heavy a run of luck as this," said Thorn's opponent; "and I have no doubt you friends will join us in a social sit-down, for if you are as good at cracking a bottle, singing a song, or telling a story, as holding a hand at cards, those who are your friends are fortunate."

"I must confess," said Thorn, "that I am not of a convivial or musical turn, though I can occasionally tell a good story. I have a little history now, sir, upon my tongue's end, that will be of uncommon interest to you."

"To me! Pray tell it, sir," said the gamester, with a laugh. "It will be a good wind-up for the evening's entertainment."

It was now long past midnight; absorbed in the excitement of the game, we had scarcely noticed the flight of time, or that the adjoining rooms were now nearly deserted by their occupants, and that the two other players, at the other end of the apartment in which we were, had finished their own game long since, and been spectators of that between Thorn and his opponent, and were now apparently interested listeners.

"About three years since," began Thorn, "a young man in Kentucky, the confidential agent of a large business firm, was intrusted to transact some business in New Orleans; it was his first visit to that city. He started happy, leaving behind him a young wife and lovely infant. Unfortunately upon one of the Mississippi boats, or immediately upon his arrival in New Orleans, he fell in with a professional man—a man of play, I mean—you understand."

The gambler nodded, and Thorn continued:

"By the management of this 'professional,' the young man was enticed to a 'hell,' induced to play, plied with wine, stripped of his money—in short, to use a 'professional' word, 'plucked'—"

"Ha! ha! the old story," said the gambler, "the fate of pigeons."

"But I have not finished; that which most interests you is yet to come."

"Indeed! Go on."

"The young man was perfectly sobered by his loss; he returned to his hotel; stung with remorse and half crazy with excitement, he placed a pistol to his head and blew out his brains, leaving a tarnished name as an inheritance for his wife and innocent child."

"But what is all this to me," said the gambler, now pale as ashes beneath the flashing eye of the speaker; "is it a moral lesson you're about to read here, or a sermon you have to preach?"

"What is it to you?" continued Thorn, his voice quivering with excitement. "All I'll tell you what it is to you. This meeting of you and me to night, which for three long years I have sought, is not mere chance. The hand of Heaven is in it. 'Twas three years ago this very night, ay, this very hour," said he, glancing at his watch, "that the young man I spoke of rushed madly into eternity—not by his own hand, but his opponent at the card table is he that should be accountable for that deed of blood—the amount of money he lost was just the amount I have won this night from you—that very ring upon your finger is his! I AM HIS BROTHER, AND YOU ARE HIS ASSASSIN!"

Thorn pronounced these words in a firm, clear, ringing voice, and as he concluded, brought his hand down with a blow upon the table at which they were sitting, which was instantly overturned, as he and his opponent started simultaneously to their feet. They were scarcely six paces apart after springing from their chairs, and both drew their weapons as they rose.

"Die! die!" shouted the gambler, discharging his weapon the moment he gained his feet. The bullet ripped open Thorn's waistcoat, and his watch flew in fragments from the pocket, dangling by its chain; at the same moment his arm, which was slowly rising, became rigid as that of a statue—the pistol he held exploded, and the gambler fell back a corpse upon the carpet.

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years ago as a sort of note of hand, which he promised to redeem with five hundred dollars that he owed me—a debt of honor, sir—but he never paid it; so I retain the ring. No, stranger, I guess I won't sell it."

"But the owner? You should have made him pay; five hundred dollars is a dear price for such a trifle."

"Why, as to that," said the player, as he gathered up his cards for the next hand, "he couldn't come to time very well, for he 'paid the debt of nature,' as they say, the same night, and that cancelled my obligation. Ah! the stake's mine—there's always luck in this ring, sir, I believe," said he, as he drew the money towards him; "suppose we try a larger stake," and he prepared to shuffle the cards again.

"As you like," said Thorn.

"Well, what shall it be?" said his opponent, "anything from one to five hundred?" and he threw a bank note of that denomination carelessly, as if in bravado, upon the table.

To our surprise Thorn drew a wallet from his pocket, and produced an equal amount of money, then sweeping the cards they had been using from the table to the floor, he called for a fresh pack, and passing them, as the attendant brought them to him, rapidly through his hand, he gave them to his adversary, remarking to him as he did so, to "mind his glances as he went through that operation."

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studded with jewels; old matchlocks that might have rung on the battle fields of Ivan Veliki; battle axes, lances, and cimeter and daggers of every form, were borne by this gaudy throng, whose mode of riding offered every possible variety in the way in which a man can sit on a horse.

Some ride without stirrups, loose and graceful as the Greek warriors who live on the friezes of the Parthenon; others sit in a sort of legless arm chair, with their knees drawn up before them in the manner of sartorial equestrians. Every sort of bit, bridle, saddle, and horse-trapping which has been used since horses were subjugated to man, could be seen here. Some of the saddlecloths and holsters were of surpassing richness and splendor. In the midst of all these cavaliers two attracted particular notice. One was a majestic-looking old Turk, with an enormous beard and a towering turban, whose garments were of such a rich material and strange cut that one was reminded immediately of the figure of the High Priest in Rembrandt's picture, or of the old engravings of the Sultan in old books of travel.

He was a young deputy from Gouriel, with clustering hair flowing down in curls from beneath a small patch of gold and jewels fixed on the top of the head, whose face and figure were strikingly handsome, and who was dressed in a magnificent suit of blue velvet ermine, flashing with precious stones. He was a veritable Eastern Antinous, and was well matched with his beautiful horse. This cavalcade of the "peuples somnises a la Russie" was to strangers the most interesting part of the procession; but it passed too quickly by for the eyes to decompose its ingredients. What stories of the greatness and magnificence of Russia will those people take back to their remote tribes. They went by, bright, shifting, and indistinct as a dream of the "Arabian Nights." The only objection one could make to this part of the procession was that it was over too soon, and that the eye wandered after it to the curve of the lines of soldiers which hid it from view.

THE CAZAR.—The correspondent then describes the Court and official carriages. As the last of the train of carriages passes a noise like distant thunder rolling along the street announces the approach of the Czar. But his presence is gradually heralded. Immediately after the members of the Council of the Empire, the Grand Marshal of the Court, rides in an open phaeton, gilt like the rest; but bright as he is and all about him, there comes after he and his retinue with the lustre of which he is as a mote in the sun. In gilt casques of beautiful form and workmanship, surmounted by crest eagles of silver or gold, in milk-white coats and gilded cuirasses and hawk plumes, approach the giants of the first squadron of the Chevalier Gardes of his Majesty the Emperor, each on a charger fit for a commander in battle. These are the picked men of 60,000,000 of the human race, and in stature they certainly exceed any troops I have ever seen. All their appointments are splendid, but it is said that they looked better in the days of the late Emperor, when they wore buckskins and jackboots, than they do now in their long trousers. The squadron was probably 200 strong, and the effect of the polished helmets, crests and armor was dazzling. The equipment could scarcely be distinguished, except by their position and the extraordinary beauty and training of some of their horses, which slowly beat time, as it were, with their hoofs to the strains of the march. The first squadron of the *Garde a Cheval* follows.

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